

08-22-10

Series: The Resurrections

# The Resurrections (19)

## What Happens to Christians Who Die?

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

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[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

(Continuation from 08-15-10)

### The Doctrine of the Resurrections

([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#))

The Thessalonians' *ignorance about the Rapture* caused them to grieve. It was to give them hope and to comfort them that Paul discussed that momentous event, giving a fourfold description of it: **1) its pillars, 2) participants, 3) plan, and 4) profit.**

**So far we have looked at: 1) The Pillars of the Rapture: 1.** The Death of Christ, **2.** The Resurrection of Christ, and **3.** The Revelation of Christ. Now let us look at the participants of the rapture.

#### 2) The Participants of the Rapture

[1 Thessalonians 4:15b \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that [we] who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

Two groups of people will participate in the Rapture: those who are alive at the coming of the Lord and those who have fallen asleep. That Paul used the plural pronoun we indicates that he believed the Rapture could happen in his lifetime. He had a proper anticipation of and expectation for the Lord's return, though unlike many throughout church history, the apostle did not predict a specific time for it.

He accepted Christ's words in [Matthew 24:36](#), and in [Acts 1:7](#). At the same time, Paul understood the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which illustrates the foolishness of not being constantly prepared for the Lord's return ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)).

The Lord expressed the point of that parable when He declared, **"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour"** ([Matthew 25:13](#); cf. [Matthew 24:45-51](#)). Paul thus avoided both common errors regarding Christ's return; he neither got involved in date setting, nor did he push the return of Christ into the distant, nebulous future. Once again, let us look at [1 Thessalonians 4:15b](#).

Several other passages express Paul's fervent hope and expectation that he himself might be among those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. In [Romans 13:11](#) he wrote, **"that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."**

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The salvation of which he wrote was the *redemption of the body* ([Romans 8:23](#)) that takes place when Christ returns. In [Romans 13: 12](#) Paul added, “**The night [of man’s sin and Satan’s rule] is almost gone, and the day [of Christ’s return] is near.**”

He wrote to the Corinthians, ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)); Paul knew he was in the messianic age, the period between Christ’s first and second comings, the last days of human history. He likely had no idea that they would last as long as they have. Later in that epistle, Paul, as he does here in [1 Thessalonians](#), includes himself among those who might still be alive at the Rapture ([1 Corinthians 15:51-52](#)).

As he concluded that letter Paul wrote, “**Maranatha**” ([1 Corinthians 16:22](#)). *Maranatha* comes from two Aramaic words that mean “**Oh Lord, come!**” and expresses Paul’s strong hope that the Lord would return soon. Earlier in this epistle, he commended the Thessalonians for waiting “**for His Son from heaven**” ([1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)).

He expressed his desire in ([1 Thessalonians 3:13](#)) for them that God would “**establish their hearts without blame in holiness.**” Pronouncing a final benediction as he concluded this letter, Paul wrote in ([1 Thessalonians 5:23](#)) “**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely....**” The apostle wrote to Titus in ([Titus 2:13](#)) that he was “**looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.**”

On the other hand, Paul fully realized that he might die before the **Rapture**. In [1 Corinthians 6:14](#) he acknowledged that he might be among those resurrected at the **Rapture**. He affirmed to the Philippians in ([Philippians 1:20](#)) his desire that “**....Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**”

At the end of his life, sensing his imminent death, he wrote to Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:6-7](#).

[1 Thessalonians 4:15b](#) (NASB)

<sup>15</sup> **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that [we] who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

While acknowledging both possibilities, Paul used “**we**” because when he wrote, it was still possible for the Lord to return in his lifetime. By so doing, he conveyed to the Thessalonians his own longing for Christ’s imminent return. Paul lived in constant expectation of Christ’s return. ([1 Thessalonians 4:15b](#)) But the apostle nevertheless reassured the Thessalonians that those of their number who had died would not miss the **Rapture**, which will also include **those who have fallen asleep**.

Moreover, the living **will not precede** the dead. They will not take precedence over them or gain an advantage over them. Those who die before the **Rapture** will in no sense be inferior to those who are alive. All Christians will participate in the **Rapture**.